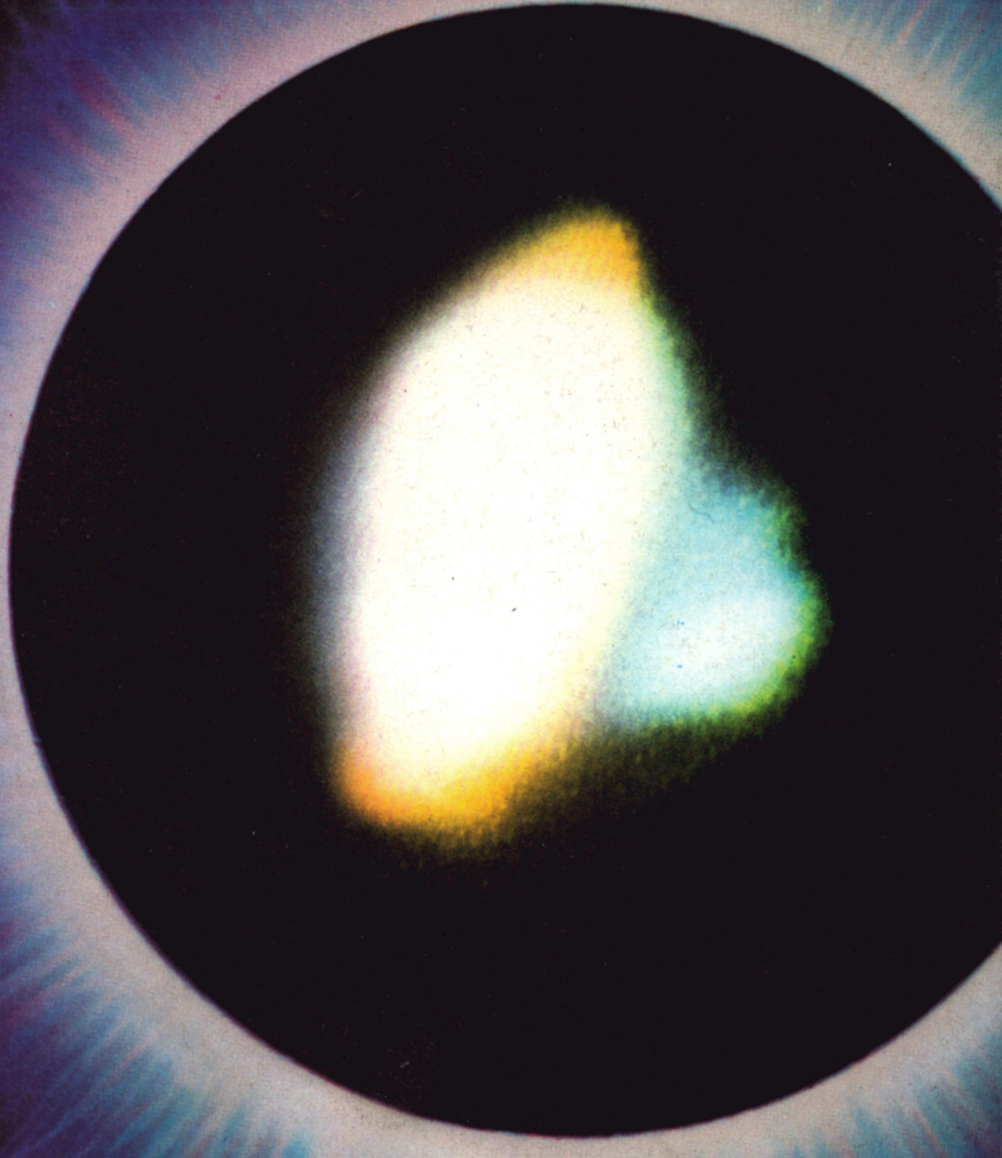
65p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Practical ufology
The soul and the shaman
Ghost of Ardachie Lodge
Miracle in Tibet
Teleportations

140



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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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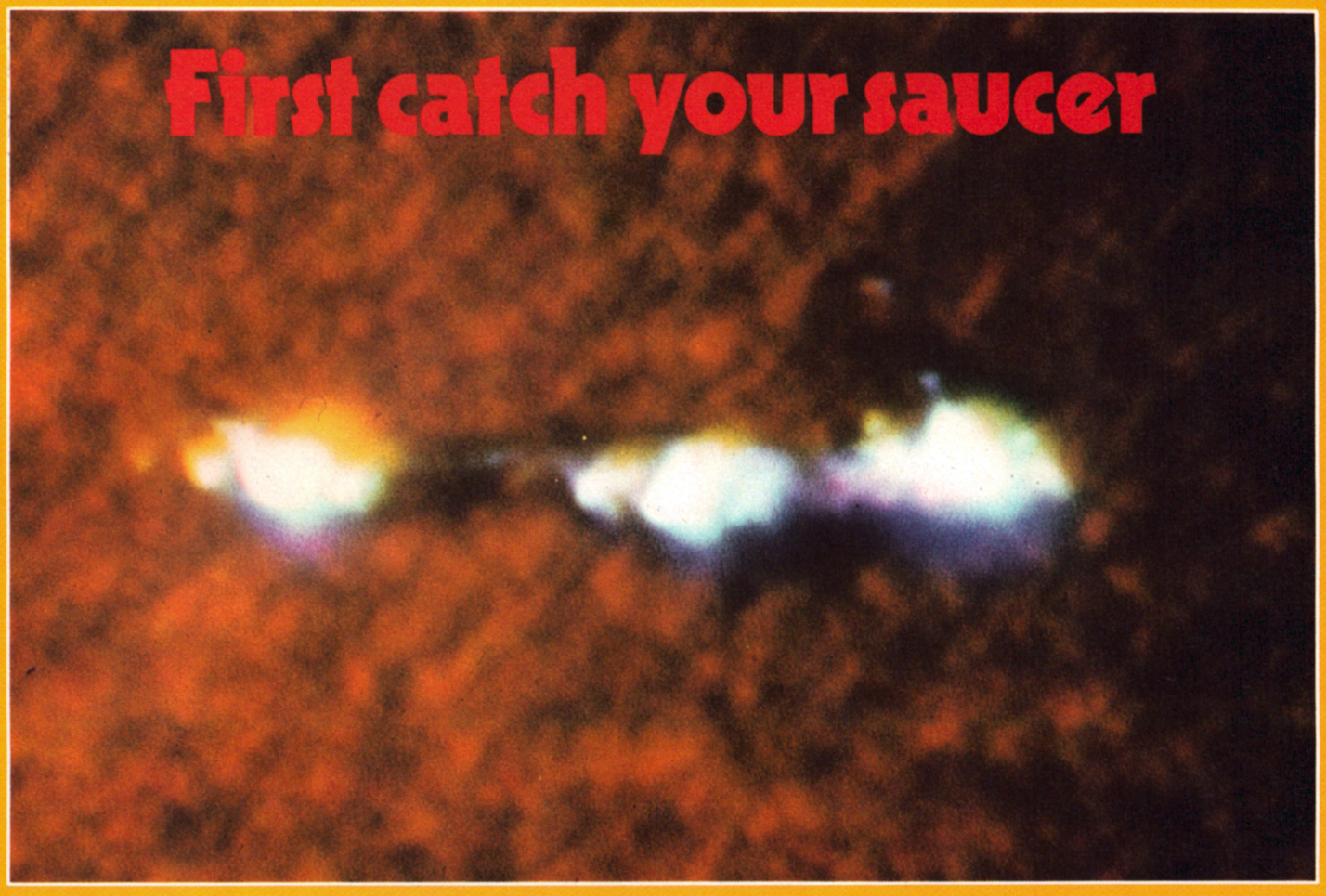
First catch your saucer



The study of UFOs is an increasingly complex business involving big money and sophisticated hardware. HILARY EVANS reports on the investigators and the instruments they are using to turn science fiction into science fact

MOST UFO RESEARCH is carried out at second hand – following up what other people say they experienced. This means that ufologists often work with very nebulous material; it also means that sceptics, with a fair show of reason, can assert that the 'evidence' could be explained as either hallucination or misinterpretation – or just plain lies.

So every ufologist hankers for a more direct contact with the subject of his research – something to dissect, measure or analyse. Best of all, of course, he would like a close encounter of his own; it frustrates him that the most exciting things seem always to happen to people who tend not to appreciate their good fortune. Why can't it be the chairman of the British UFO Research Association who has a close encounter? Why don't the aliens abduct famous ufologists such as Aimé Michel or Dr J. Allen Hynek, who are probably in the best position to evaluate such an experience? (Yet, if such eminent 'believers' were actually abducted, perhaps it would seem too good to be true.)

Failing such unlikely happenings, the ufologist would appreciate tangible evidence that could be analysed objectively: a crashed 'saucer' would be ideal, or even a few fragments of one. But, again, the phenomenon seems reluctant to oblige. So the ufologist has to lower his sights yet further and seek confirmation of human testimony through the use of monitoring instruments – such as radar – or photographs that contain easily recognisable points of reference and other useful data. This is one form of practical ufology.

A close encounter with a car's headlights? Probably not, though UFO sightings sometimes turn out to be the product of terrestrial rather than extra-terrestrial objects. This photograph taken in Montserrat, Spain, is only one of some 500 photographs, each recording similar aerial phenomena in the same region

The other form consists of testing hypotheses. If an analysis of UFO reports shows that strange objects are more likely to appear in one place rather than another, or at one time rather than another, or only under certain meteorological conditions, then these are things that can be tested. Similarly, if a witness reports that he has made contact with aliens who have provided information about themselves, this too can sometimes be tested. Some supposed alien entities give details of their planet of origin, such as the 'Ummites' (see page 2661): if astronomers were able to locate such a planet – where none had hitherto been known – this would be a significant verification, if not absolute proof, of the encounter.

Both approaches have been attempted, although to a very limited degree. The almost total lack of funding available means that most ufologists have to finance their own research; it is hardly surprising, therefore, that it is liable to be both on a small scale and

intermittent compared with more orthodox scientific research.

Of course, it is far better to try to obtain evidence directly, rather than via witnesses. Not every ufologist is a reliable witness, but most will almost certainly be in a better position to judge what they see than the average man or woman in the street. In the early, optimistic days of ufology, simple skywatching was a favourite occupation, even among the most academic ufologists. In fact, in the 1950s there seemed to be so many UFOs about for it to make sense for those interested in the phenomenon to gather at a favourable location with cameras and any other monitoring equipment that could be mustered – and hope for the best.

In Britain one particular location has become associated with skywatching: the hills above Warminster in Wiltshire. Over the years, thousands of casual observers have spent nights on Cradle Hill. The results, however, have been ambiguous, to say the least. If there were ever any genuine phenomena, they rapidly became overshadowed by too many reports of malobserved helicopters, car headlights, even other observers' torches or cigarette lighters – to say nothing of deliberate hoaxes.

A welcoming committee

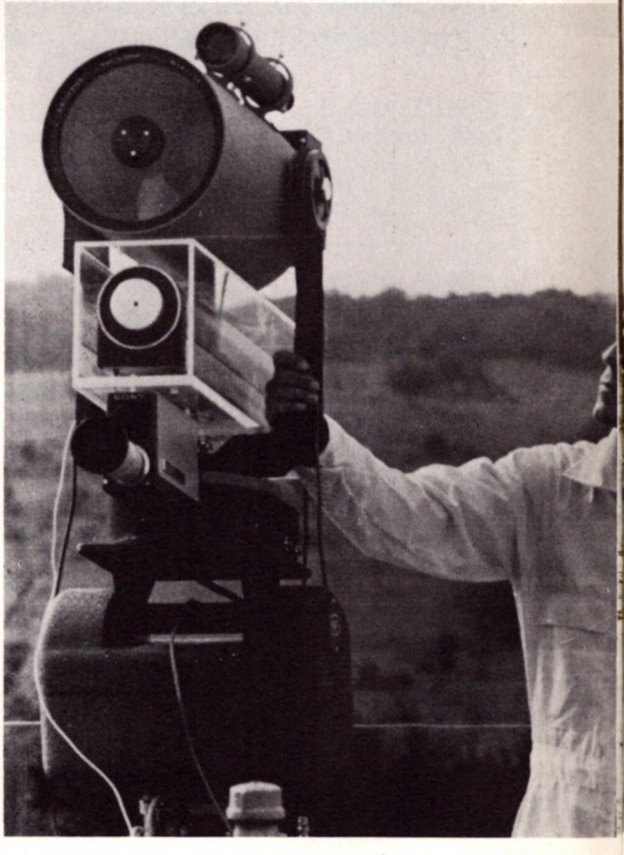
Even so, nothing at Warminster was ever quite as ridiculous as the *soirée d'observation* organised by the French Institut Mondial des Sciences Avancés in association with the noted science fiction author Jimmy Guieu in June 1982. The soirée was held in a ruined castle in Alsace where luminous phenomena had been reported. It was a curious affair. Over 50 people turned up despite pouring rain: the barbecue was a great success, a hypnotist on the staff of the institute performed spectacularly, and by midnight a good many bottles of wine had been drunk. And the phenomena? One of the participants said: 'The Ovnis [UFOs] did not come. And even if they had come, we would not have seen them for the early morning mist, nor heard them for the clink of bottles.'

Fortunately, not all skywatching is so puerile. Probably the most ambitious plan was Project Starlight International, set up by Ray Stanford in a rural area near Austin, Texas, USA. Starting in 1973 he and his team, who comprised a research facility of the Association for the Understanding of Man, gathered an impressive array of monitoring and communications equipment. This included a radar unit, perched on a tower from which it could scan the entire valley below, and a set of recording magnetometers that monitor and automatically record a wide range of anomalous events, including electrostatic effects, temperature changes, gravitational disturbances, barometric alterations, and even unusual sounds. There were also two devices for communicating with UFOs: one, the UFO Vector, employs a red laser beam that can direct a signal containing up to $2\frac{1}{2}$ million bits – units of information – per second, in the form of voice or video signals, to any UFO in line of sight, and automatically records any response; the other is an array of 91 spotlights, arranged in a circle on the ground around a central light, that can be manipulated to form thousands of patterned signals. These are intended to communicate with UFOs in mathematical or other codes.

Two men whose mission is to identify the unidentifiable: Frenchman Jimmy Guieu (above) and American Ray Stanford (right), director of Project Starlight International. Stanford is shown with his latest gadget which, he says, will enable him to communicate with UFOs. The device is designed to transmit images to the spacecraft on a laser beam

Then there is ARGUS – appropriately named after the watchman of classical myth – an acronym for 'automatic ring-up on geolocated UFO sightings', which means that when the monitors indicate that a UFO is in the area, they also alert the human observers, who then photograph the object. As the UFO moves out of the area, the monitors plot its course, alerting different observers on the ground. All the photographs are then computer-analysed to try to establish the UFO's distance, size and altitude.

Operation Starlight is a UFO observer's dream: equipment estimated as costing something like half a million dollars is clearly out of reach of most UFO organisations. But even so, what chance is there that UFOs will manifest in precisely the right place to be detected even by all this sophisticated instrumentation? Yet the project claims several impressive sightings. When Charles Hickson, one of the alleged abductees in the controversial Pascagoula case in October 1973 (see page 914), was visiting the facility, a large orange 'daylight disc' was reported. On 10 December 1975 another orange-golden object was sighted, and some 42



Below: Arne Thomassen, one of the people involved with investigations in Hessdalen, Norway, sets up equipment preparatory to a long wait: UFOs do not always arrive on cue. One of Thomassen's colleagues on the UFO-Norge project thinks it fair to assume that 'they' are watching us watching them; perhaps this accounts for their shyness. But the long wait pays off when images like this (right) are captured on film. Taken by Thomassen in September 1982, the photograph shows an unidentified object suspended in the skies over Hessdalen – shortly before disappearing from sight

photographs taken, before it moved away. Some of the objects monitored have been shown to be natural in origin, but even negative results are an essential part of the operation – by providing data that can be analysed and, by a process of elimination, cases can be properly assessed. A case that might otherwise have been filed as a 'UFO' can, thanks to Project Starlight, be filmed and perhaps shown to be the planet Saturn (this actually occurred in 1974).

'This project is unique anywhere in the world,' claims Stanford. 'We are trying to gain evidence so that the scientific community will take this thing [ufology] seriously.' To judge by the project's files, Stanford has not had a very satisfactory return on his great investment in both time and equipment, but such an ambitious project at least calls for admiration and deserves to be successful if *any* practical approach is capable of elucidating the UFO riddle.

A totally different approach to skywatching has been adopted by Spanish ufologist Luis José Grifol of Barcelona. Since the mid 1970s, Grifol has been visiting the local mountain district of Montserrat, which he believes to be particularly favoured by UFOs because of its long cultural and religious tradition. Pious pilgrims and tourists alike are attracted to the spectacular region with its dramatically shaped rocks: perhaps, in the light of recent speculation (see page 2301), it may be the geophysical character of Montserrat that attracts UFOs. But whatever the explanations, between 1977 and the end of 1982 Grifol had secured some 500 photographs of anomalous aerial phenomena in that region alone.

Grifol makes contact

Instead of relying on sophisticated instruments, Grifol believes that UFOs communicate telepathically with him. The crew members of the UFOs he has photographed are, he claims, 'space intelligences' who come from a planet located between the stars Bellatrix and Rigel, near Mintaka in the constellation of Orion. In August 1980, in the presence of 17 witnesses, Grifol asked his alien contacts for proof of their relationship, suggesting that they move their UFOs in response to his directions. They did so, he claims, over a period of 20 seconds.

Grifol alleges that to establish this kind of contact one has to be in a suitable mental and spiritual state, detached from mundane preoccupations and concerning oneself more with 'higher' matters. Unfortunately, such vague assertions are of little evidential value: most ufologists would have felt happier if Grifol's sightings had been confirmed on one of Starlight's instruments. Nonetheless, Grifol has his 500 remarkable photographs.

But Warminster and the hills of Spain are not the only areas noted for their UFOs. Inland from Trondheim in the central region

of Norway is the thinly populated district of Hessdalen. There is no obvious reason why it should be specially favoured by UFOs: yet since December 1981 there has been a continuous flow of reports from the area. This kind of concentration of 'visits' is rare enough in any case; that they were sustained over so long a period gave Norway's ufologists a unique opportunity for observation. However, it is difficult to see just why the UFOs chose Hessdalen, as Arne Thomassen comments:

> Why they [UFOs] show such seemingly great interest in the unpopulated mountain valleys in central Norway is difficult to figure out. There is very little in this area to spy on, and our military capability is unlikely to be of any particular interest to such doubtless highly advanced entities. The possibility that they are visiting some selected people or programming their minds seems unlikely since Hessdalen is very thinly populated. The UFOs mostly move through valleys where no people live at all.

A celebrated UFO

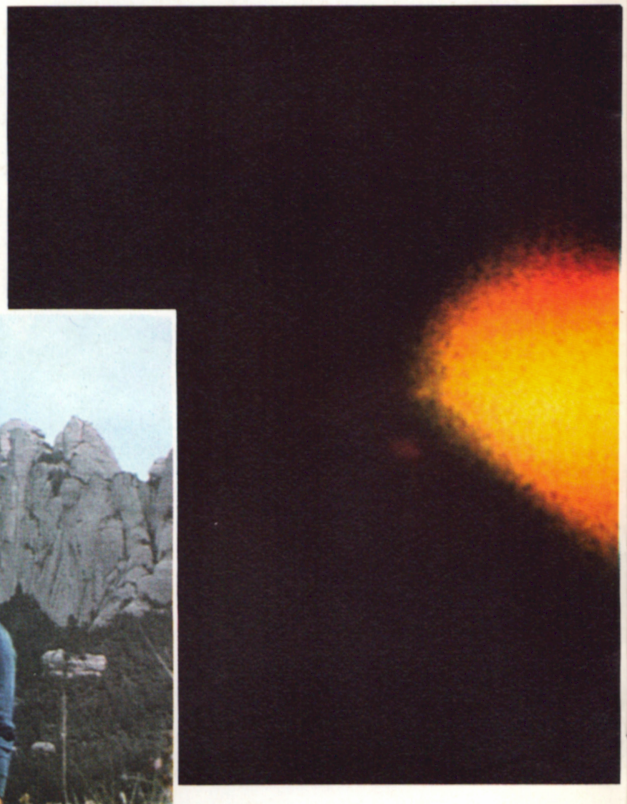
This eyewitness account is typical of the reports received by UFO-Norge. Bjarne Lillevold, a miner, describes what he saw on 24 September 1982:

> As I was on my way home from work, I and a colleague saw a light against the mountains near Hessdalen. We drove about 5 kilometres [3 miles], and then the object began to descend towards the forest, near Ålen. When we ourselves reached Ålen, the object was hovering close to the trees. My companion, who hadn't seen the celebrated UFO of Hessdalen before, was very excited by the sight. We drove to the centre of Ålen, and then saw a second object which came from the direction of Hessdalen and halted below the other. I then drove on my moped to Hessdalskjølen, where I saw an object near a cottage. At first I thought the cottage itself was on fire, but then I saw it was something else, which looked like an upside-down Christmas tree and bigger than the cottage beside it. It was about 4 metres [13 feet] above the hill, and had a red light on it which blinked: there also seemed to be a curious 'blanket' over the whole thing. The object was moving up and down like a yo-yo for about twenty minutes; when it was close to the ground the light faded, but at the height of the manoeuvre it was so bright that I could not look at it for long. When the light was near the ground I could see through it as though it was made of glass. . . .

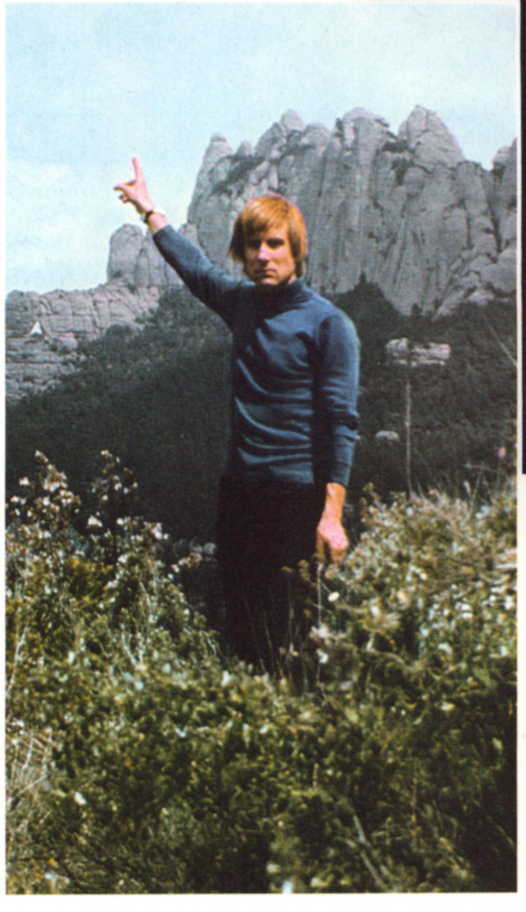
It is interesting that in many respects Lillevold's experience resembles the American Cash-Landrum sighting (see page 2121)– which also involved a large, bright object alternately rising and falling, with a light that varied in intensity.

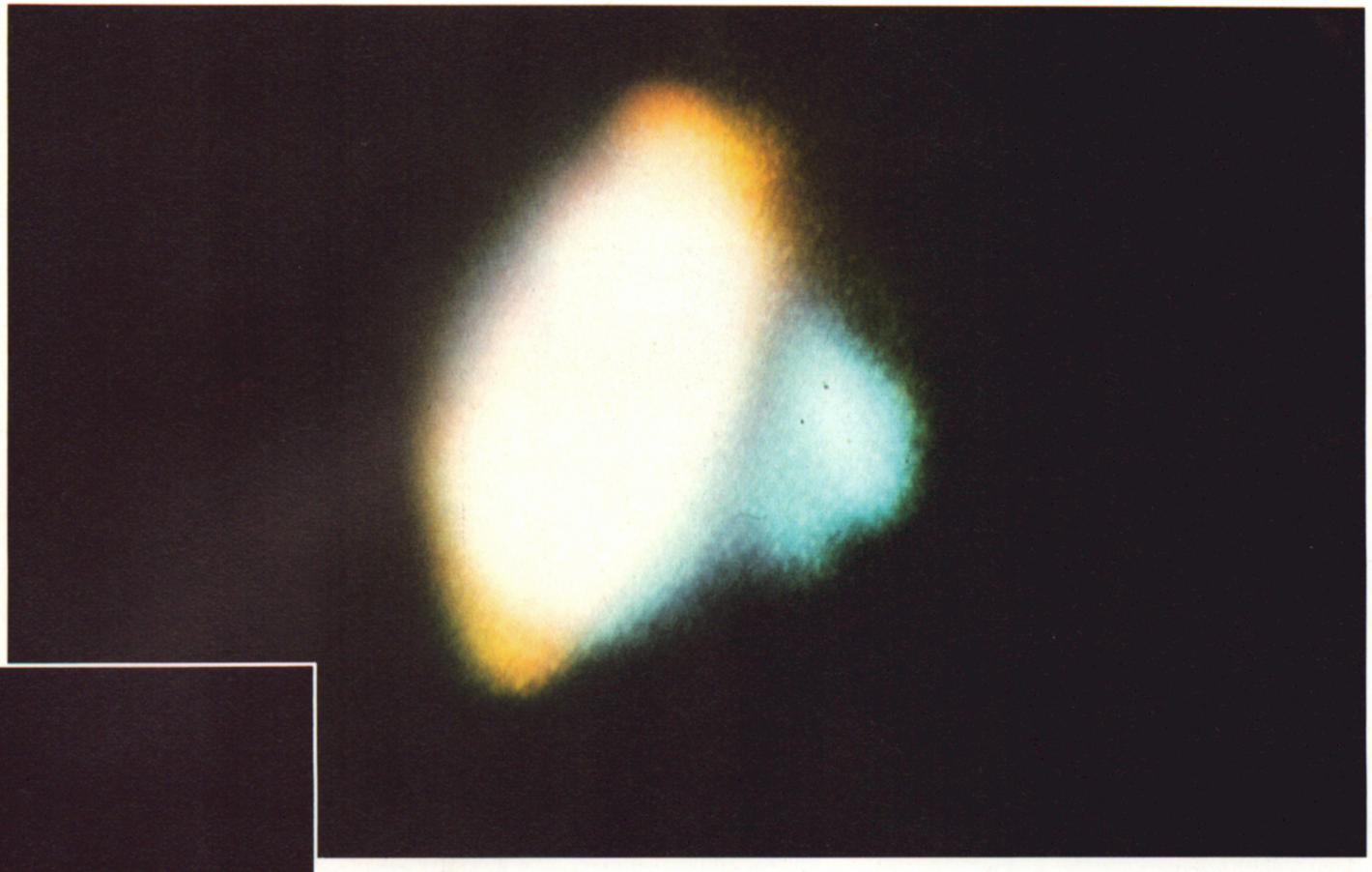
The Norwegian investigators were determined to do more than passively record such accounts, and to make the most of the opportunity for practical research. As Leif Havik of UFO-Norge comments, 'We should have stayed for at least a month to get any results. However, with very few active members, with inadequate resources and with no support from anybody at all, we have done our best.' Armed with what they could raise in the way of magnetic detectors, spectrum analysers and field strength detectors, infrared cameras and so on, they made several expeditions into the rugged terrain of Hessdalen. But, although the instrumental results were disappointing, a great many photographs of anomalous phenomena were taken by seven different photographers, all of which present much the same kind of image. Most appear to be little more than vaguely shaped blobs of various colours, but there is

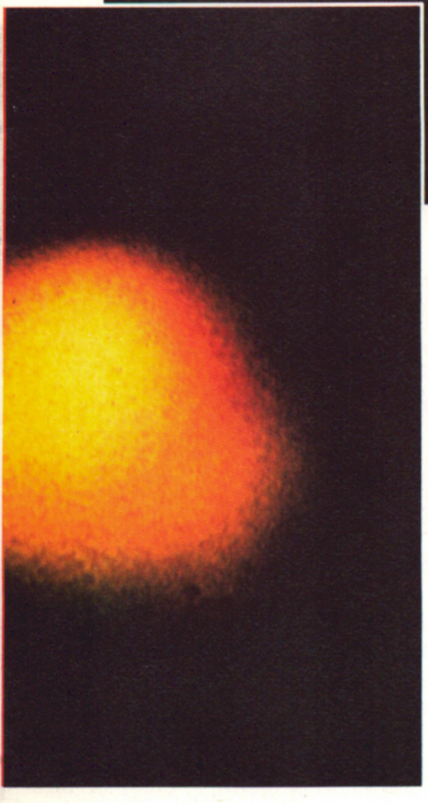
One coloured blob may not be convincing enough proof of the existence of UFOs but when the image has been recorded hundreds of times by various witnesses using different equipment then the evidence becomes difficult to ignore. Here is one example of the many unidentified objects seen over Montserrat (right) and similar phenomena recorded over Hessdalen (below right)



Below: the Spanish ufologist Luis José Grifol on site in Montserrat. He eschews the use of sophisticated equipment







perhaps some indication of the shapes that witnesses have reported, ranging from simple rectangles to the classic disc shapes. Consistent patterns of movement have also been recorded – so this research may well prove to be of great significance.

The Norwegian investigators hope that they will at least secure sufficient evidence to convince others, who have more means at their disposal, that there is a phenomenon worth studying. Requests for help or information to the Norwegian Air Force have been of no avail; they claim that because nothing criminal has been reported, such matters are outside their jurisdiction. UFO-Norge has sought to establish that UFOs are, indeed, potentially criminal, in that they are violating Norwegian airspace, but the officials remain unconvinced.

Date, time and direction

Nevertheless, the evidence for the existence of UFOs is mounting, and with it the case for investigation. Analysis of UFO-Norge data is revealing some patterns in behaviour: the time of day affects the number of sightings and so, for no reason yet apparent, does the date – the majority of sightings seem to occur between the 15th and the 25th day of the month. Another curious fact is that twice as many UFOs have been reported travelling from south to north as vice versa. This was true also of the celebrated 'ghost rockets' that flew over Norway and other Scandinavian countries in 1946, when all but a handful were reported coming from the south, prompting theorists to suppose that they were some kind of military device originating from the former Nazi missile sites at Peenemünde – although this was almost certainly not the case.

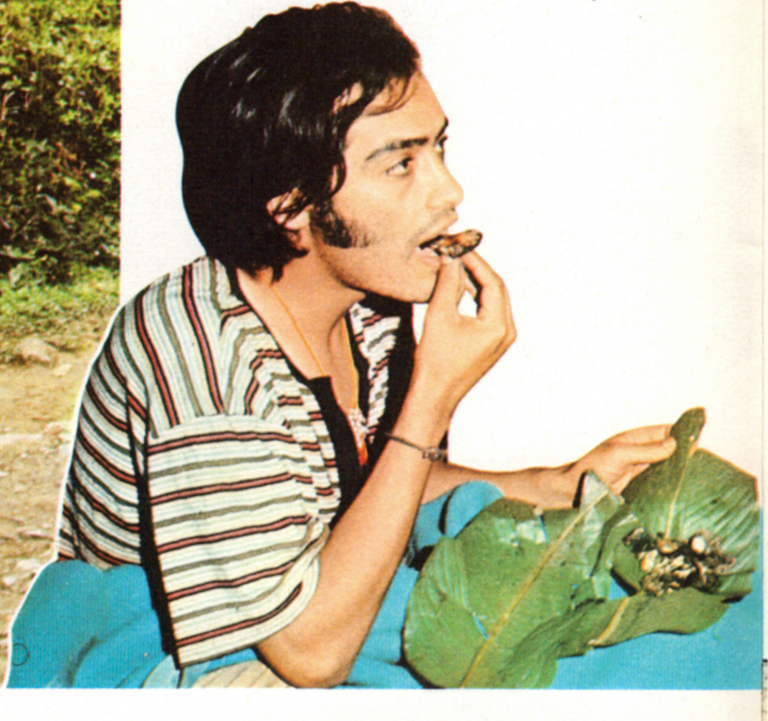
There is another aspect of the Hessdalen sightings that is even more disconcerting, although in this case Leif Havik can offer an explanation. He, like Grifol in Spain, believes that UFOs – or those who control them – are well aware of the fact that they are being watched and investigated. That UFOs seem to disappear just as Havik is about to record their presence may bear this out:

> The main reason why I think they are under some kind of control is this: five times I have seen a UFO just when I have arrived on the mountain, before I had time to get my camera. On all five occasions, I was less than 100 metres [325 feet] from the observation point I had selected.

In fact, anecdotes of such elusiveness are common – and not only in ufology: observers at Loch Ness claim a similar 'bloody-mindedness' on the part of their quarry. However, there is some persuasive evidence that UFOs are indeed acting in response to the activity of human observers. And on some occasions, this phenomenon is recorded by monitoring instruments.

Distinguishing between low-flying satellites, imagination – and UFOs; on page 2814

In search of lost souls



All over the world, shamans use hallucinogenic drugs to enable them to leave their bodies at will. But, asks FRANCIS KING, how does this help them tend the bodies and souls of their patients?

THE SHAMAN sees the physical world as being inferior to, and conditioned by, the spirit world with which he communicates and to which he believes he travels when in trance.

Even the most ordinary physical events – a hunter's broken leg, or his failure to find game, for example – are seen as the results of supernatural happenings. Perhaps the hunter is the subject of an attack by malicious spirits; perhaps he has failed in showing the proper respect to the gods and thus incurred their displeasure; perhaps, and this is the worst possibility of all, a part of his spirit has wandered, without the hunter realising it, from his body and become lost or imprisoned by evil demons.

During the 1960s, the village of Huautla de Jimenez, Mexico, attracted American hippies because of the local shamans' practice of eating sacred mushrooms (above right) known for their capacity to produce visual and auditory hallucinations. Mushrooms are often eaten by the entire community in rituals to honour the dead (above: a woman on her way to a funeral, where she will partake of the sacred mushroom)

In many shamanistic tribes bodily sickness, particularly illnesses associated with high temperature and delirium, such as typhus and smallpox, are attributed to the latter cause. Thus among the Altaic tribes of Siberia the belief was – and still is, for, in spite of many decades of communism, primitive communities still survive on the fringes of the Soviet empire – that really severe fevers were often caused by the imprisonment of the sick man's soul in the realms of Erlik Khan, one of the supreme rulers of the underworld. It is clear that in this context the word translated into English as 'soul' means something more nearly akin to 'vitality' or 'life force' than to the 'soul' of Christian belief. For it is perfectly possible for an Altaic tribesman to remain conscious, and even to conduct a rational conversation, when his soul is absent from his body.

Just as the shaman can, so it is believed, travel upwards to the heavens while his body lies in trance, so it is possible for him to descend into the seven *pudaks* (literally obstacles, but the word 'hells' indicates the meaning of the word more precisely) of the infernal regions. This downwards journey is considered far more difficult and dangerous than the upwards transformation of consciousness into the nine heavens (see page 2745), so only the most powerful of shamans can undertake it. Even these latter supposedly risk death or madness when visiting the hells and only the 'blue shamans' – men who are specialists in dealing with evil spirits – can make the journey in complete safety. Before a shaman will travel to Erlik Khan's black palace in search of the soul of a sick person, he will first search more readily accessible locations.

The shaman therefore begins by entering a trance state, 'leaving his body', and looking

for the strayed souls in the immediate vicinity of the sick person's yurt, or tent. If he finds the soul he can usually, so it is believed, coax it back into the body to which it properly belongs.

If, however, the soul is not nearby, the shaman searches further afield. He sends his spirit to examine the beds of lakes and rivers (both of which unlikely locations appear to be popular with truant Siberian souls), the depths of the forest and the vast plains of the steppes. From all these places the shaman's spirit can usually persuade the lost soul to return home, although the task is not quite as easy as when the soul has remained near its yurt. If the shaman's urgings are in vain, and the soul will not return to its bodily home, the illness continues and the patient dies.

If the soul cannot be found, it is concluded that it is a prisoner in the palace of Erlik Khan. The only way to get it back is to conduct a kind of infernal exchange of prisoners – Erlik will release a soul only if he is given another in exchange for it.

The shaman then negotiates with either the sick man's family or, if the patient is capable of conversation, the man himself, a fee for the ransoming of the lost soul. At the same time it is decided whose soul shall be stolen and delivered to Erlik; it is likely to be some individual who has displeased both the shaman and the patient. When the chosen victim is asleep the shaman enters trance and leaves his body. The shaman then transforms his spirit, usually into the form of an eagle or other bird of prey; shape-shifting is one of the arts in which shamans excel. The shaman-eagle flies to the victim's yurt, dives upon his body and seizes the struggling soul in its cruel beak.

Right: the palace of Erlik Khan, in Siberian mythology one of the supreme rulers of the underworld. In order to cure the illness of a patient the shaman, in the form of an eagle, captures the soul of an innocent victim and carries it struggling to the palace of Erlik Khan. There he exchanges it for the soul of the sick person, which lies imprisoned within the walls of the palace

Above: a first-century Roman wall painting of the Bacchanalian dance of Dionysus, a wild nature god, and the Maenads, his female followers. Initiation into the Bacchanalian cult followed a pattern closely similar to that of shamanistic initiation

Then begins the journey downwards to Erlik Khan's palace. When this sinister dwelling, built of black boulders cemented together with black clay, is reached, the shaman politely asks the infernal ruler to make the exchange of souls, and the latter usually agrees. The shaman returns the released soul to the body of the patient, who begins an immediate recovery. But the man whose soul has been stolen and delivered to Erlik Khan falls sick, becomes sicker and eventually dies.

Sometimes a shamanistic procedure involving trance is undertaken, not so much for the sake of curing an illness but in order to determine its eventual outcome – to find out whether the gods have decreed life or death for the patient. A team led by R. Gordon Wasson has actually tape-recorded a Mexican ceremony of this type in its entirety.

This rite was performed on the night of 12 July 1958, in the Mazatic village of Huautla, by three shamans, two of them women, for the purpose of finding out whether a 17-year-old boy, Perfeto, would or would not recover from the chest illness – probably tuberculosis – with which he was afflicted. On the basis of divine messages they received at the height of the ritual, the shamans prophesied death, a gloomy prognosis that was fulfilled a few weeks later. These messages were directly *heard* by the shamans – any visions they saw were transitory and regarded by them as being comparatively unimportant.

The emphasis on what is heard, rather than what is seen, in Mexican shamanistic trance, is in marked contrast to its Siberian counterpart, and probably originates in a purely physical cause – the fact that Mexican shamans generally induce trance states by

eating a particular type of semi-poisonous mushroom that is noted for its ability to produce auditory hallucinations. This 'divine mushroom' is unique only in that the hallucinations it produces are primarily aural rather than visual. For in every part of the world shamans use hallucinogenic plants as a way of 'loosening the girders of the soul', entering into trance and, so it is believed, coming into contact with gods, demons and lost souls. In Siberia, for example, shamans drink an infusion of the dried heads of *amanita muscaria*, the fly agaric mushroom or red, white-spotted 'toadstool' that often features in illustrated books of fairy tales, as a quick method of achieving trance and vision.

The use of fly agaric has been, and remains, very widespread in Siberia. In the 18th century Count von Strahlenberg, a Swedish officer who had been a prisoner in Siberia for some years, described how the local population reached a state of 'drunkenness'. They did not, he reported, know the use of fermented liquors, but instead relied on an infusion of fly agaric, a sort of 'mushroom tea'. This drink, he added, was so highly valued by the tribesmen that the dried heads of the mushroom had become an article of commerce, a luxury that only the rich could afford. Those, added the observant Swede,

> who cannot afford to buy in a store of these mushrooms, post themselves . . . around the huts of the rich, and watch the opportunity of the guests coming out to make water; and they hold a wooden bowl to receive the urine, which they drink off greedily, as having still some virtue of the mushroom in it, and by this way they also get drunk.

But the 'drunkenness' observed by von Strahlenberg was very different from alcoholic intoxication. Steven Krassenikov, another 18th-century observer of Siberian tribal culture, remarked that those who underwent it

> are subject to various visions, terrifying or happy, depending upon differences in temperament; owing to which some jump, some dance, others cry and suffer great terrors, while some might deem a small crack to be as wide as a door, and a tub of water as deep as the ocean.

In other words, the drinking of fly agaric was often productive of something closely resembling both the 'bad trip' of the LSD user and a shamanistic trance in which the shaman has lost control over the flood of visionary images that fills his consciousness.

Many anthropologists and students of ancient religion assert that the use of fungi and other plant substances to induce changes of consciousness is of great antiquity, probably almost as old as humanity itself. Thus, for example, in classical Greece ergot, a fungus that grows on rye and other grasses, was administered to initiates of the mystery cult of Eleusis in order that they might 'see the goddess'. Similarly, in ancient India a substance called soma was reputed to be both 'the food of the gods' and the chosen food of those who wished to come into contact with those gods. While the exact nature of soma has been the subject of much scholarly disputation – one eccentric academic of the last century believed it to have been rhubarb, a substance whose laxative properties evidently seemed to him to be almost supernatural – it is now accepted as probable that it

Below: a 'soul-catcher' of the mid 10th century, found on the north-west coast of America. Like the Siberians, many of the North American Indian tribes believed that the souls of sick people went wandering in the underworld, and shamans would cure their patients by retrieving their souls and returning them to their bodies

Left: this puppet was found by the Nass river in British Columbia, USA, in 1910. It was used by shamans of the Tsimshian tribe in dramatic performances and curing ceremonies

Further reading

M. Eliade, *Myths, dreams and mysteries*, Harville Press 1960

M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1964

Brian Inglis, *The forbidden game*, Hodder and Stoughton 1975

was some hallucinogenic substance partaken of by priests and shamans so that they might briefly experience the life of the immortals.

But some important questions remain: do shamans have any genuinely supernormal powers? Do they genuinely transcend normal consciousness – or are they doing no more than inducing vivid hallucinations?

Roman Catholic priests who accompanied Spanish soldiers and administrators to the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries had no doubt of the answer to these questions. Some shamans, they averred, were able to obtain knowledge of the future and of things happening in distant places. But these 'supernormal abilities' owed nothing, they said, to the personality of the individual shaman – they were the gift of Satan, master of all shamans and wizards.

More than one Spanish chronicler asserted that the information given byshamans was 'perfectly exact'. Thus Gonzalo d'Oviedo y Valdez stated that the Amerindian shamans of Hispaniola had secret means of putting themselves into communication with spirits 'whenever they wish to predict the future'. He had personally witnessed shamanistic rites and claimed to have observed the accuracy of the predictions made. The shaman, he wrote,

> appeared to be in ecstasy and to be suffering strange pains . . . while he lay senseless on the ground the chief, or some other, asked what they desired to know, and the spirit replied through the mouth of the inspired man in a manner perfectly exact.

Spanish-speaking theologians, particularly Jesuits, regarded shamanism as a dangerous and diabolical parody of the genuine physical and psychical phenomena associated with Roman Catholic mysticism. Priests were instructed to question Indian converts to Christianity closely as to whether they had drunk peyote – the favourite hallucinogen of Mexican shamans, made from cactus tops – 'in order to find out secrets or discover the whereabouts of lost or stolen articles'.

Throughout the centuries peyote has retained its reputation as an aid to shamanistic prophecy and divination. Thus, around the turn of the century, Dr Rafael Bayon, who was working among Colombian Indians, bluntly stated that the shamans who drank peyote could accurately observe and describe distant events. Similarly, in the 1920s some French missionaries asserted that shamans who wished to know the answer to a question had only to imbibe peyote to

> obtain a solution . . . in an auditory form – a person appearing to them and telling them what they want to know, or visually – as if, for example, they were to see the landscape, the person or the plants which would serve them to the desired end.

The very nature of shamanistic activity dictates that there can be no hard scientific proof of the validity or otherwise of many of the claims made by its practitioners. On the purely anecdotal level, there is a good deal of evidence that some shamans experience genuine clairvoyance and clairaudience. And in the absence of hard scientific evidence, there is no proof that they do not.

Above: a healing ceremony conducted by a Cambodian shaman, Nhar Phan, in Khao i Dang, Thailand, in 1980. Holding sticks of incense, the shaman splashes his patient with healing water and speaks a prayer in a strange, ecstatic language

Above right: an Eskimo Inua mask, probably dating from the 19th century, found in south-east Alaska. The mask represents the soul of a salmon, and was worn by the shaman during ceremonies, presumably aiding him in his journeys beneath the oceans to visit the Mother of the Seals to ask for food during times of famine. The seven pendants are stylised representations of fish, and were thought to reinforce the magical power of the mask

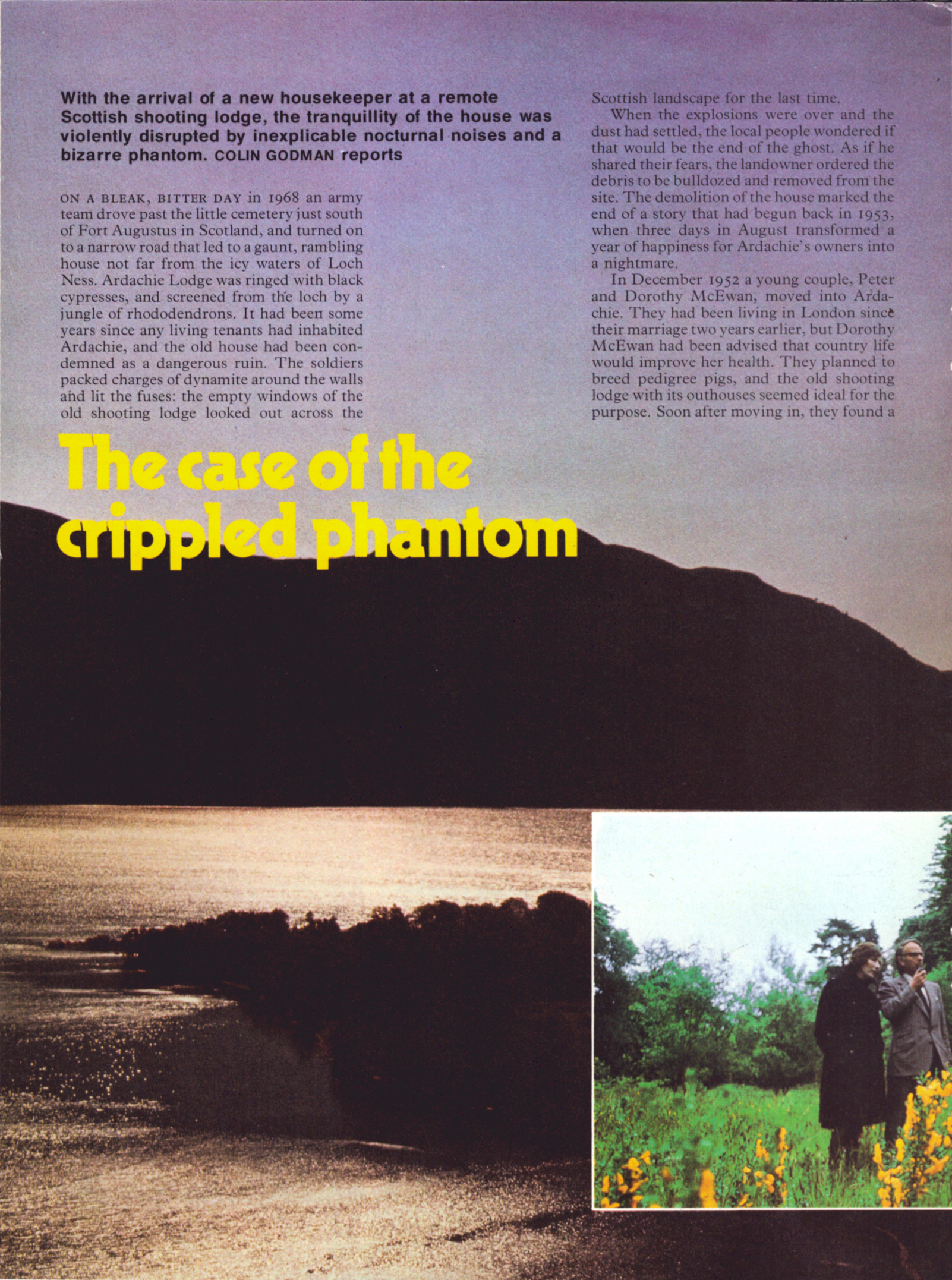
The case of the crippled phantom

With the arrival of a new housekeeper at a remote Scottish shooting lodge, the tranquillity of the house was violently disrupted by inexplicable nocturnal noises and a bizarre phantom. COLIN GODMAN reports

ON A BLEAK, BITTER DAY in 1968 an army team drove past the little cemetery just south of Fort Augustus in Scotland, and turned on to a narrow road that led to a gaunt, rambling house not far from the icy waters of Loch Ness. Ardachie Lodge was ringed with black cypresses, and screened from the loch by a jungle of rhododendrons. It had been some years since any living tenants had inhabited Ardachie, and the old house had been condemned as a dangerous ruin. The soldiers packed charges of dynamite around the walls and lit the fuses: the empty windows of the old shooting lodge looked out across the Scottish landscape for the last time.

When the explosions were over and the dust had settled, the local people wondered if that would be the end of the ghost. As if he shared their fears, the landowner ordered the debris to be bulldozed and removed from the site. The demolition of the house marked the end of a story that had begun back in 1953, when three days in August transformed a year of happiness for Ardachie's owners into a nightmare.

In December 1952 a young couple, Peter and Dorothy McEwan, moved into Ardachie. They had been living in London since their marriage two years earlier, but Dorothy McEwan had been advised that country life would improve her health. They planned to breed pedigree pigs, and the old shooting lodge with its outhouses seemed ideal for the purpose. Soon after moving in, they found a



local girl to act as nanny to their toddler and new baby, and a gardener-handyman to help on the land. The McEwans added chickens and sheep to the pedigree pigs, and by the summer they were sufficiently established to be able to employ a live-in couple – the wife as housekeeper and the husband to help with the livestock.

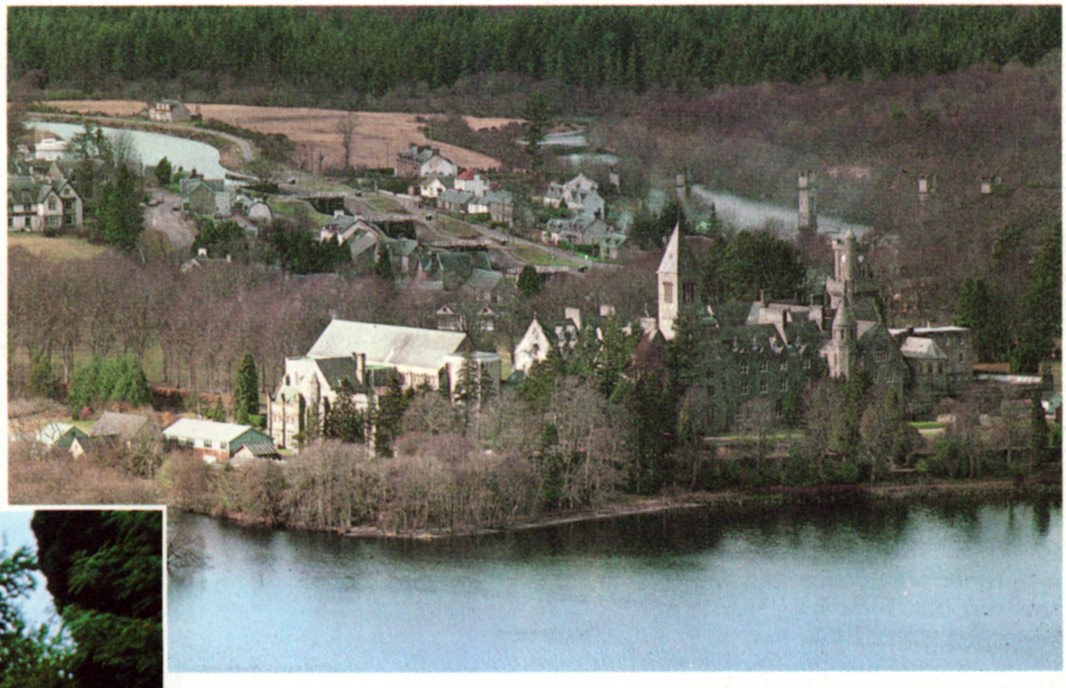
Situations vacant

The job of finding a suitable couple was undertaken by Peter McEwan's parents in London. An advertisement in a newsagent's window attracted the McDonalds, a couple in their forties. They were interviewed, and accepted the post even though they were not told the identity of the family they were to serve, or the location of the house. Within a week, they were aboard a sleeper on their 400-mile [650-kilometre] journey north. At Spean Bridge they were met by Peter McEwan's father (who owned a cottage in the locality) and he drove them to Ardachie.

Their arrival at the house on 17 August 1953 marked the end of the McEwans' Highland idyll. The events of the next three days were recorded at the time by Peter McEwan, who was a member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), and a report based on his account was subsequently published in the SPR's *Journal* in December 1955.

The McDonalds were determined that their month's trial period at Ardachie should be a success. As Peter McEwan observed, they had burned their boats. McDonald had been employed as a postman in London, and by giving up his job he had lost his pension. His wife was a strong-willed woman and had made up her mind to settle down with the McEwans. They made a careful inspection of the house and grounds, and enquired about their duties. As it was obvious that they were both tired after their long journey (Mrs McDonald had been unable to sleep on the train) Dorothy McEwan bade them goodnight early, and joined her husband and father-in-law for supper.

The family were gathered in the sitting room at about 10.30 when the McDonalds burst in. They apologised for the interruption, and asked whether there was anything 'wrong' with their room. Soon after going to bed, Mrs McDonald had heard footsteps that disturbed her twice. As the corridor appeared to be deserted, she had woken her husband, who had slept through the noises. The footsteps had returned, said Mr McDonald, and he had heard them, but they seemed to come from the wall, not the corridor. To reassure the couple, the McEwans explained the layout of the old house, and suggested various sounds that the visitors might have heard. All their suggestions were rejected by the McDonalds: the cat's movements were too quiet, the dog had been locked away in a shed, and the hum of



Below: Dr Peter McEwan and his wife Dorothy standing on the site of their former home, Ardachie Lodge, which was demolished in 1968. The isolated house, near Loch Ness (left), was more than a mile from the nearest village and half a mile from a public road. Fort Augustus (right) was the nearest town

the generator (which produced electricity for the isolated house) was nothing like the sound of footsteps. Dorothy McEwan retraced her own movements about the house earlier in the evening, but these could not be heard in the McDonalds' bedroom. Mrs McDonald insisted, however, that the steps she had heard had been human.

By this time it was late in the evening, and everyone retired to bed. An hour after their first appearance, the McDonalds roused the household. They were both plainly terrified, and said that something 'supernatural' had happened. After going back to bed they had heard rapping: three or four blows at a time on the wall. As soon as McDonald switched on the light the rapping stopped.

The McEwans and the McDonalds went downstairs to the kitchen. Peter McEwan suggested that the two men should return to the bedroom, where they sat in the dark for 10 minutes, listening – but heard nothing. At midnight it was decided that since Mrs McDonald was obviously not going to be able to get a night's rest in that room, the couple should be moved to the guest room. This was some distance away, separated from the first room by two flights of stairs and another corridor.

As soon as she entered the guest room Mrs McDonald crossed to the far wall and pressed her ear against the fireplace, as if listening for something. Then she said, 'She's in here. There's a woman in this room.'

She turned away from the wall, and suddenly stiffened in horror. Dorothy McEwan said, 'Don't look like that, Mrs McDonald,' and glanced at the men to urge them to bring her back to the door. But everyone in the room seemed frozen in a bizarre tableau. Mrs McDonald seemed to be in a state of trance; she was staring fixedly into a corner of the room and beckoning something towards her. Yet the others could see nothing.

After a moment or two the spell was broken by Mrs McDonald appearing to awake from a kind of dream. She looked around her and seemed puzzled; she asked the others what they had seen. She said she had seen 'an old lady with a cap on her head, a shawl around her shouders and . . . beckoning me to follow her.' Mrs McDonald also said that the old lady had 'straggling grey hair' and that the experience had been preceded by 'a noise like a rush of wings'.

The household set off to find yet another bedroom where the couple could sleep. Peter McEwan was privately resolving to question his neighbours the following morning to learn more about the previous owners of the house. Would any of them fit Mrs McDonald's description of the old woman? Meanwhile, he asked Mrs McDonald whether she had felt anything else strange about the house in the short time she had been there. She told him that during a walk round the grounds that afternoon she had been overcome with a distinct feeling of unease in a little overgrown garden just outside the sitting room window.

It was clear that Mrs McDonald was in a distressed state. She said she felt 'as if all the strength has been washed out of my body.' Dorothy McEwan suggested that the couple should sleep in the empty room opposite the McEwans' own bedroom, which was far away from the scene of the earlier alarms. They would leave both doors open and the lights on, and then surely Mrs McDonald would have nothing to fear. This plan was

In scenes from the BBC television series *Leap in the dark* (1977), a dramatic reconstruction of events at Ardachie, Mr and Mrs McDonald (played by Neil McCarthy and Wendy Williams) arrive at the house (top) to be employed as handyman and housekeeper by the McEwans (above, played by David Buck and Jacqueline Pearce)

carried out, but within minutes the McDonalds heard faint tapping on the bedhead; Mr McDonald was adamant that it was not the movement of the bed against the wall.

The party gathered again on the landing at the top of the main staircase. Suddenly Mrs McDonald froze, and showed signs of fear. 'There she is again,' she said. 'Can't you see her? Now she is crawling on her hands and knees with what looks like a candlestick in one hand.' McEwan urged his housekeeper to speak to the apparition. 'What's troubling you?' she managed to murmur, but was unable to continue. None of the others could see anything unusual.

In further scenes from the television reconstruction *Leap in the dark* the McDonalds, who had retired early after an overnight journey from London, are awakened (above) by footsteps apparently coming down an empty corridor. Alarmed, they go to find Peter and Dorothy McEwan, who join them in the kitchen (top) to discuss their next move

Mrs McDonald began an hysterical running commentary on the crawling woman. At first the figure moved away round a corner; then it returned and began crawling with difficulty towards the terrified Mrs McDonald. The housekeeper was so frightened that the others had to bundle her downstairs to the safety of the kitchen.

Another conference was held, and the four of them agreed to abandon the house for the rest of the night and sleep in Peter McEwan's father's cottage near by.

The next morning, after feeding the animals and breakfasting, Peter McEwan paid a visit to his neighbour, Mrs Beckett of Cullachy House. He knew that she had been a close friend of the previous owners, the Bruens, and he hoped that she would be able to tell him something about the history of the house. It seemed that Ardachie had been built in 1840 as a large shooting lodge for one Charles Gillespie. Although essentially a Georgian-style country house, it incorporated some older farm buildings. Many local people still had vivid memories of the busy months of the year when shooting parties were in residence.

Between the two World Wars a Colonel Campbell was master of Ardachie, and it was after his death that the estate was sold to the Bruens, who had previously owned property in Ireland. Old Mrs Bruen and her sister Lady Hare had been very popular in the neighbourhood. McEwan asked Mrs Beckett to describe old Mrs Bruen carefully. Would the description match his housekeeper's description of the apparition?

Yes, agreed his neighbour, Mrs Bruen wore a kind of shawl and a small hat, and her hair might well have looked as Mrs McDonald had described it. Had she died at Ardachie? McEwan asked. No, replied his neighbour. Although she had lived at Ardachie until a few months before her death, she had eventually been taken to a nursing home in Inverness. It seemed that Mrs Bruen had suffered from a crippling form of arthritis, and had had a stroke so that it was very difficult for her to move in the last months of her life; she had been in the habit of crawling on her hands and knees.

As he made his way home, McEwan wondered whether his housekeeper could really have seen a ghost invisible to the rest of them. The remainder of the day passed without incident. The McDonalds moved their beds downstairs to their own small kitchen, and they retired to bed early at 9.30 p.m. Fifteen minutes later Mrs McDonald got up again, having remembered that she had forgotten to bring in the milk, which was left outside the back door by the shepherd each evening. As she went towards the kitchen door the rapping started, and when she opened the door she saw the old woman waiting at the foot of the stairs. She could not discern any clear features, and the wraith seemed, she said later, barely human. She rushed back into the kitchen and slammed the door.

After this experience, the McEwans and the McDonalds hesitated no longer. Taking the two children with them, they abandoned the Lodge for that night.

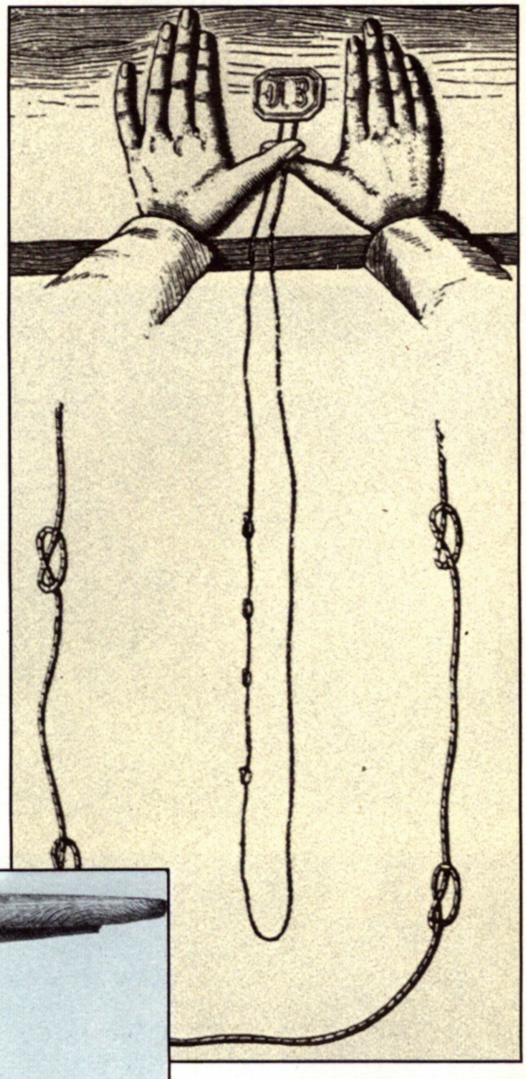
More nocturnal disturbances cause the McEwans to sell their home: see page 2818

Alarms and excursions

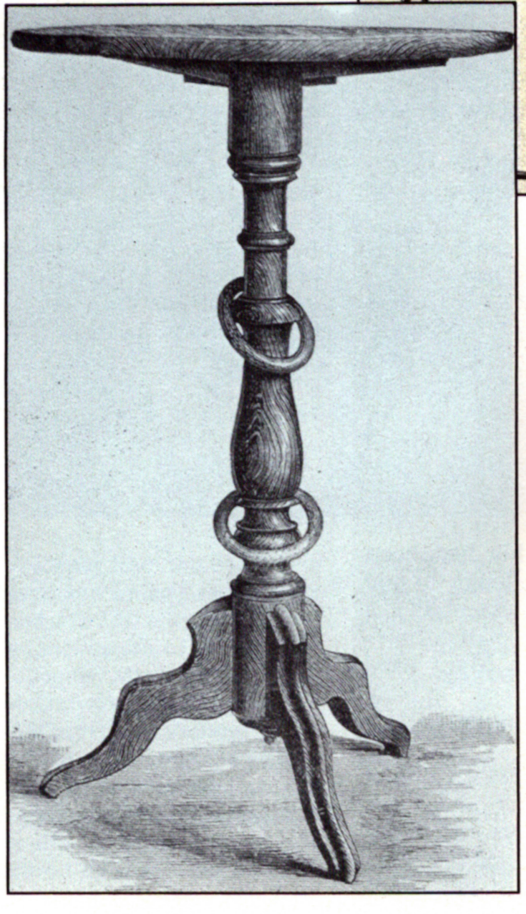
Can solid objects dematerialise and reappear at another place? Or pass through other objects without disrupting them? JULIAN ISAACS suggests this is sometimes what happens when 'mislaid' items inexplicably 'just turn up'

ON THE MORNING OF 6 MAY 1878 Johann Zöllner, professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Leipzig, sat with the American medium Henry Slade in a room that had been set aside for an experiment in parapsychology. No other person was present. Zöllner held both of Slade's hands in his own on top of the card table at which they sat. After about a minute a small circular beechwood table standing a few feet away began to rock to and fro, its top rising above the edge of the card table as it did so. The circular table then slid slowly towards the card table, tipped over backwards and slid beneath it.

Nothing further seemed to happen for another minute; Slade was about to consult his 'spirit controls' about what they should expect when Zöllner glanced under the card table to check precisely the position of the circular table – only to find that the latter had disappeared! The two men then searched the room, but found no sign of the circular table.



The scientist Johann Zöllner meticulously recorded his teleportation experiments with the medium Henry Slade. In one experiment (right) Zöllner sat with his thumbs pressed down on a loop of string that dangled over the edge of the table. The single knot in the loop was secured with a wax seal. After a few minutes Slade announced that knots had been created in the string, and those shown in the picture were found to have appeared. On another occasion Zöllner requested that wooden rings be linked; the 'spirits' instead transferred them to the leg of a table (below) – a feat that should have involved dismantling the table



A striking phenomenon

Zöllner and Slade then resumed their places at the card table, with their hands linked on its top and their legs touching, so that Slade could not make any undetected movements. After five minutes' expectant waiting Slade saw lights in the air, as he usually did before psychic events occurred to him. Neither Zöllner nor any of his colleagues ever saw these lights when they participated in sittings with Slade, but Zöllner followed Slade's gaze:

> As I turned my head, following Slade's gaze up to the ceiling of the room behind my back, I suddenly observed, at a height of about 5 feet [1.5 metres], the hitherto invisible table with its legs turned upwards very quickly floating down in the air upon the top of the card table.

The table was no mere hallucination – it gave both men a sharp crack on the head as it descended.

This sober and careful account describes teleportation – the disappearance of matter and its reappearance at the same or another place, with no known cause being involved. Such events are also sometimes called 'disappearance-reappearance' events. A phenomenon that is presumably closely related is the passage of matter through matter – for example, the passage of an object into or out of a sealed container, or the tying of knots

without the use of any normal means.

Such phenomena are reported from some seances, experiments with certain psychokinesis (PK) agents, and in some poltergeist cases. However, they are hardly ever witnessed under 'good' conditions (that is, with parapsychologists in attendance and full experimental controls); so even parapsychologists who seem willing to accept more controllable and 'reasonable' phenomena, such as ESP, join the sceptics in dismissing such tales out of hand as tall stories for the gullible. And because these events exceed most people's 'boggle threshold' (to use the term coined by the author Renée Haynes) and seem to be impossible to reconcile with conventional physics, they have largely been ignored in parapsychology. Zöllner, certainly, was scoffed at, and he was never taken seriously by the parapsychological establishment – for reasons that seem to have more to do with the fantastic nature of the events than with any obscurity in his reports or shortcomings in the conditions of observation. But another contributory factor was that Slade, years later when his powers of mediumship were in decline, was declared by an investigating committee to cheat in the production of 'spirit writing' on slates.

Other sittings by Slade witnessed by Zöllner produced 'impossible' movements of objects: on many of these occasions knots were tied in loops of string, leather or even pig-gut while Zöllner was holding them or otherwise had them under his control. A sitting that was intended to link two wooden rings did not succeed – but it ended with the rings 'impossibly' sitting on the central leg of the circular table whose teleportation has already been described. This table was well out of Slade's range when the event happened, as he was sitting with Zöllner at the other table at the time; to put the rings on the leg, any human agent would have had to take the table to pieces and reassemble it.

Top: capsules used by Julian Isaacs in experiments. The objects inside, intended to be teleported out of the capsules, are as small and light as possible

Above: the author (second from right) with an experimental group. In the boxes are objects that they attempt to teleport. Two boxes have been sealed with sticking plaster, on which a grid of pencil lines has been drawn. Any tampering inevitably disturbs the grid

Left: a pair of leather loops before and after being paranormally linked. The event occurred beneath Zöllner's cupped hands – and he felt the loops move

Zöllner's work fills a number of weighty volumes, but only a tantalising fraction of this material is available in English translation. Yet if anyone's work deserves an attempt at replication, it is Zöllner's.

Just such an attempt, apparently successful, was reported in the summer of 1932 in the *Journal* of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR). The report was written by William Button, then president of the ASPR, who was present at the eight sittings reported and was intimately concerned with the mediumship of 'Margery' – Margery Crandon.

In the experiments the spirit of Margery's dead brother, Walter, ostensibly moved small objects into or out of various kinds of

Spontaneous teleportation of a spanner? There has been a spate of such events in the 'E.' family since the parents, Judy and John, have successfully taken part in the author's metal-bending experiments. The spanner was kept hanging on a hook in a locked garden shed (left). It was last seen there in October 1982 – but thereafter it went missing from the shed and could not be found anywhere, despite a thorough search of the garden and the shed. In March 1983 Mr E. found the spanner – on a wardrobe (below) in his five-year-old daughter's room. It was now rusty, whereas it was formerly in mint condition. All in the family insist: they *didn't* put it there

containers – cardboard boxes sealed with sticking plaster, locked wooden and metal boxes, and so on. This was done many times under apparently good conditions. Poor Margery was bound to her chair with sticking plaster at wrists and ankles; several turns of the plaster were used at each point and it was marked with pencil lines that would show whether the plaster had been taken off and rewound. When objects were teleported out of a container the fact could be checked by shaking the container, when there would be no sound of the object bouncing around inside. Then another object might be teleported into the container – all without the container being opened.

A major problem with these experiments was that Margery's husband, Dr Crandon, was allowed to participate in many of the sittings and in some of them was even allowed to assist in controlling the medium's movements. The possibility of collusion cannot, therefore, be excluded. And Margery did indeed become embroiled in prolonged and bitter controversy in connection with other aspects of her physical mediumship (see page 1830).

More recently another highly controversial psychic, Uri Geller, has claimed that a number of spontaneous teleportation events have happened to objects, or even people and animals, connected with him. For example, it is said that Geller suddenly arrived in the glass porch of his friend Andrija Puharich in Ossining, New York, having a moment before been walking in Manhattan, an hour's journey away. (See page 621.)

The Indian mystic and religious teacher Sai Baba is the subject of a number of tales brought back by Westerners who have visited him. His speciality is the materialisation of small objects from thin air; the most usual gift is *vibhuti*, a powdery greyish substance sometimes called holy ash (see page 235). The Western parapsychologists who have visited him have never been allowed to impose controls over him. However, Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson managed to examine one of Baba's robes and found no pockets or other hiding places. Nor did it bear traces of *vibhuti* down the sleeves, which would be expected if Baba were shaking it down them into his hand. But the parapsychologist's judgement on him must remain open because he will not perform under controlled conditions.

Intelligent projectiles

One of the prime occasions of apparent teleportation and the transport of matter through matter is the poltergeist case. In many of these, stones or other missiles apparently arrive from nowhere. Sometimes the missiles do not become visible until they strike an object. A well-known case occurred in 1903. A geologist, W. F. Grottendieck, was conducting a survey in Sumatra. One night he was sleeping in a hut roofed with a layer of large leaves. He was awakened by some small stones falling on and around him. Several more such showers occurred, giving him a chance to investigate their origin. The stones apparently came from the roof, but he could find no gap in the overlapping leaves through which they might have arrived normally. They seemed to fall with unnatural slowness, and when he tried to catch them they seemed to change direction. 'Intelligent' projectiles of this kind are not uncommon in poltergeist cases. However, they are not usually hot – whereas in this case they were warm to the touch.

Very many cases involve the mysterious disappearance of objects, although there is only one very brief account of anyone actually seeing an object vanish in front of them. It happened to a Mrs Kogelnik in London in 1922. The Kogelnik household had been

experiencing poltergeist disturbances for months, apparently centred on a maidservant. On this occasion Mrs Kogelnik was working in the loft of the house. Her husband's account records: 'As my wife saw an axe disappearing before her eyes, she quitted the room. All this happened between 10 a.m. and 12 noon, and the light was good for observation.'

Many reasonably well-authenticated disappearance-reappearance events could be cited. There is now accumulating evidence that apparently completely ordinary people may experience minor ones fairly frequently. The replies to the author's enquiries suggest strongly that teleportation may be going on far more frequently, in a minor and usually unnoticed way, than we would ever assume to be possible. The SPR has woken up to this possibility and has started Project JOTT to try to collect a representative selection of such cases. (JOTT stands for 'just one of those things'.)

What does all this mean? A favourite answer has been that space has a fourth dimension, or even more, and that when objects appear and disappear in our world they are actually moving in the fourth dimension (see page 541).

This is a perfectly reasonable hypothesis. But there are competing explanations, of course. One is the hypothesis that objects become invisible temporarily. But while this is consistent with certain kinds of cases it would not explain the exit of objects from sealed boxes. And hallucination, another frequently proffered explanation, cannot account for cases where permanent structural changes take place – such as the knots in Zöllner's loops of string. Where matter has passed through matter in ordinary three-dimensional space, it may have been taken apart, transported atom by atom and put together again accurately. Or the atoms involved may have been somehow made 'passive' and non-cohesive, so that they did not interact with each other as the objects passed through each other.

'Peter', focus of poltergeist events and apparent teleportations, seems to have been bodily teleported on occasion. Once the author, while at Peter's house, heard a loud thump from upstairs – the usual signal that Peter had 'gone missing'. Mr Isaacs rushed upstairs and pulled open the lower door of the airing cupboard seen here. There was Peter, seemingly in a dazed condition. Had he hidden himself there? In view of other, better-witnessed events centred on Peter, the author believes that these teleportations, too, may be genuine

Left: this little yellow idol is a stone buddha belonging to Mr J., a known PK agent who has taken part in the author's experiments. It disappeared after he had spring-cleaned the shelves on which it normally stood. Several days later, there was a crash as the shell seen here fell to the floor, and the buddha seemed to tumble out of the shell – which had been examined in the search for the figure. Was this 'return' triggered by Mr J.'s thoughts? For he was watching a television programme on Buddhism at the time

A process that seems to offer an analogy on the atomic scale to the transport of matter through matter is 'quantum tunnelling', in which an atomic particle 'impossibly' breaks through an energy barrier: the particle is whimsically viewed as tunnelling its way through a barrier that is too high to be jumped. It could be suggested that the transport of matter through matter is a large-scale quantum tunnelling phenomenon. But two daunting questions then arise: first, how can the tunnelling effect, usually operative only over atomic distances, be multiplied to give the kinds of distances encountered in paranormal reports? Second – and this problem is common to all attempts to apply quantum theory to large-scale psi events – how are the billions of atoms in normal-sized objects co-ordinated to make each one simultaneously tunnel to the same place? This problem is enormously more complex than, say, getting tunnels from opposite sides of Mont Blanc to meet in the middle of the mountain.

What is needed is determined research to find people gifted in teleportation, to train them to produce effects under good control, to catalogue the experiences of many ordinary people who also experience similar events, and to use modern electronic technology to explore the phenomenon (see page 1306). If a fourth dimension really exists it opens up the stunning possibility that there may exist an infinite number of other dimensions – perhaps making up an array of universes in parallel with ours. So the next time you curse an object that has unaccountably disappeared a moment after you have put it down, spare a thought for the possibility that behind this commonplace event there may lurk fantastic realities.

A miracle in Tibet

It seemed as if Sadhu Sundar Singh's fate was sealed when he was sentenced to die in a deep, dry well without food, light and air. And yet he escaped. DAVID CHRISTIE-MURRAY asks: was it a miracle?

ALL FAITHS HAVE THEIR SAINTS, mystics and visionaries, who have experiences expressed to them in the vocabulary of their own culture. A Roman Catholic may see a vision of the Virgin Mary, a Quaker may receive a revelation from the 'inner light', a Muslim may experience a communication from Mohammed, a secular poet find himself for an instant at one with the Universe and spend the rest of his life trying to express the glory of that moment's insight.

Such experiences can be used as propaganda for this or that form of belief. But they are shared by individuals of too many faiths and non-faiths to be accepted as evidence for one particular form of truth.

The story of Peter's miraculous escape from prison, when chained between two guards (Acts 12), is one that even many Christians find difficult to accept. Yet a 20th-century Christian, Sadhu Sundar Singh, not only claimed to have had a similar experience but also spoke of witnessing an extraordinary vision, one that was to change his life.

Sundar Singh's story begins in India, in the early 1890s, when he was still a young boy growing up in a wealthy Sikh family. His mother, a deeply religious woman, had taken Sundar to visit a *sadhu*, a holy man who has chosen the life of a homeless wanderer in search of truth. The meeting between the young boy and the old mystic had a profound effect on Sundar. He at once made it his resolve to search for God. When he was 14 his quest was intensified by the deaths of his mother and elder brother. A year later, possibly as a result of the missionary influences that were prevalent in India at the time, he struck out against Western religion. Christianity was anathema to him, and to show his hatred he stoned local Christian preachers and publicly burned the Bible in his village.

Three days after this denouncement Sundar is said to have received the sign he had been so fervently looking for. After praying all night he had a vision. In the vision Jesus Christ appeared to him and said in Hindustani: 'How long will you persecute

Right: an Indian holy man. It was a meeting with just such a man that was to start the young Sundar Singh on his search for God

me? I have come to save you. You pray to know the right way. Take it.'

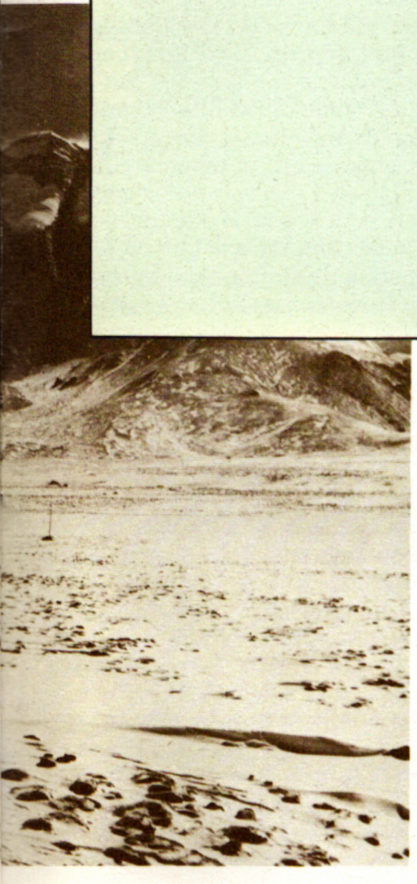
Sundar's search had ended and, perhaps, no one was more surprised than he that it should end with a revelation from a Christian God.

This was only the beginning of Sundar's story; with his personal quest now over a new journey of evangelism had begun. He was baptised into the Christian Church in 1905 but, after taking an Anglican ordination course, he decided that the conventional priesthood was not for him. His new-found faith was not a fragile thing but then neither was his sense of Indian culture and tradition. Sundar believed he could spread his own vision of Christ only if he remained unfettered by denominational bonds. Not for him the dog-collars and suits that he had seen other converted Indian priests wearing. Nor was he willing to block out his awareness of the ever-present spirit world, a world that was close to the hearts of some of the primitive villagers among whom he lived and later preached.

To resolve his dilemma he took the unique step of becoming a Christian sadhu, preaching the Gospel without material resources and relying on charity. As a sadhu he was allowed access to areas that would have otherwise been closed to him; as an Indian holy man, albeit a Christian one, he was less likely to alienate the very people he was trying to convert.

Sadhu Sundar Singh made it his special business to evangelise in Tibet. And it was in that strange and mysterious country that the miracle is said to have taken place. He crossed the Himalayas several times on foot and, though it was not easy to make converts in a Buddhist country, his zeal remained undiminished. It was during one of these trips that he was arrested and condemned to death for preaching Christianity.

Sadhu Sundar Singh (left) was undaunted by the hostile terrain of the Himalayas (below) and by the reception committee he knew would be waiting for him when he crossed to Tibet



Good Lord deliver us

Acts 12: 1–17 relates a miracle that has no apparent rational explanation. Peter was imprisoned during one of Herod's anti-Christian purges. Chained between two soldiers, he was awoken in the night by a light in his cell. An angel appeared before him, struck off his chains and led him to freedom, bolts, bars and locks proving no obstacle. Peter 'came to himself' in the city street. Until then he thought he was dreaming but, finding his experience to be real, he went to the home of his friend where a girl, hearing his voice, reported that it was his spirit outside the house. When Peter's friends saw him they were amazed by his account of his escape.

In the 20th century, Sundar Singh's miraculous escape was to cause similar surprise and disbelief.

Buddhist law forbids a true disciple to kill, so criminals are executed in ways that, by means of legal fictions, exonerate Buddhists from direct responsibility. Sundar's death sentence could have taken a variety of forms – one method was to sew the victim into a water-saturated bullock's skin. The skin would then be put out to dry. As it slowly contracted, so the person within was gradually smothered to death. Sundar's fate was to be as unpleasant. He was beaten, stripped of his clothes and then violently thrown down a dry well, topped by a heavy iron lid. By his own account, the floor of the well was carpeted with the human bones and putrid flesh of previous victims.

Time starts to run out

It was only a question of time before he either was suffocated by the stench of death or died from starvation. One thing, however, sustained him. When he had first seen his vision of Christ he reported experiencing a strong sense of peace and joy. This feeling, he claimed, remained with him always, even at times of distress and persecution. The effect of the vision – which, he maintained, was objective and entirely different from many other mystical experiences he was to have later on – was permanent. That feeling of peace and joy stayed with him throughout the duration of his incarceration.

Sundar passed the time in prayer until, on the third night, he heard the key grating in the lock above and the rattle of the withdrawn cover. He claimed that a voice called to him to seize the rope that was lowered. His arm had been injured during the beating he had received, but fortunately there was a loop in the rope into which he placed his foot and he was then hauled up the well and was

Three lamas in front of a pilgrimage shrine. The men carry traditional ritual objects – prayer wheels and rosaries. Buddhism as practised in Tibet is an amalgam of the Buddhism of India and indigenous religious beliefs

free. He claimed he heard the lid being replaced and relocked. When he was out in the fresh air, the pain in his injured arm simply disappeared and he is said to have rested until morning then returned to the local caravanserai, an inn where groups of travellers rested. He remained there for a short while before he resumed preaching.

The reappearance of a man thought to be dead and safely entombed caused a furore. Sundar was arrested, brought before the head Lama and ordered to describe his escape. His own explanation of what had happened only enraged the Lama, who declared that someone must have stolen the key. But, when he found it was still on his girdle, which never left him, he was said to have been terrified. The Lama, apparently cowed by the possibility that the escape was a product of divine intervention, ordered Sundar to leave immediately and to go as far from the city as possible.

This then was the miracle in Tibet, when Sundar Singh was supposedly plucked from certain slow death by an act of God. But was the hand that saved him divine or human? Certainly Sundar's account has its weaknesses. For example, how was it that, after his release, he was able to make it all the way back to the caravanserai without anyone commenting on his nakedness? In fact, such a sight was not as unusual in Tibet as it would have been in Britain, say. There is, however, no getting away from the fact that someone could have stolen the key that could secure Sundar's release, or there may have been a duplicate. Anyone who had been locked up for three days in the conditions he had to endure would, undoubtedly, feel confused and disorientated when eventually released. Perhaps this explains why he was unaware of any human presence when he finally gained his freedom. Another discrepancy is how, given the conditions of Sundar's entombment, he could have known he had been there for three days – although, of course, someone may have told him of this later.

A sceptic would have strong grounds, too, for pointing out that the tale rested on the unsupported witness of a single man. That man, besides a constant stream of mystical visions, had experienced other wonders. He claimed to have made contact with a secret Indian Christian brotherhood whom he urged to declare themselves publicly; and to have met a *rishi* (hermit) of great age, the Maharishi of Kailash in the Himalayas, who dwelt in a cave 13,000 feet (4000 metres) above sea-level and imparted to him a series of apocalyptic visions. The apocalyptic visions were never recorded; the secret Christian brotherhood never declared themselves. The sceptic could argue that for all his concern with Christian truth, the Sadhu was a bit of a romancer given to flights of fantasy.

A taste for the bizarre

In truth, however, the sceptic should be left to believe what he wants to believe. Miracle or no miracle, it cannot overshadow the fact that Sundar was a genuinely good man who, in his own lifetime, was revered by many as a saint.

Sundar himself always tried to play down his psychic and mystical experiences and his possession of a gift of healing. He found that a reputation for miracle-mongering pandered to the public's taste for the bizarre and diverted attention to himself and away from the Christ it was his concern to preach. His own view of the affair in Tibet was that it had been heavenly forces at work. However, he would probably have been the last person to have wanted to make a production out of the so-called miracle. Romancing to glorify himself or even the God he served was foreign to him.

In the 1920s Sadhu Sundar Singh had become something of a household name. He made many trips, financed by friends, to Ceylon, Burma, Malaysia, China, Japan, America, Australia and Europe. He preached wherever he went and met with prominent churchmen, among whom he had a high reputation. Through these trips he made a deep impression on thousands of ordinary people of many races. There were few who regarded him as a holy confidence trickster who told lies to support a cause in which he had come to believe. He continued to make trips to Tibet, and the country that had been the source of his deepest revelation also turned out to be the place where he met his end. Sundar Singh disappeared without trace, somewhere in the Himalayas, in 1929.

Further reading

C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, Hodder and Stoughton 1934

Sadhu Sundar Singh, *Visions of the spiritual world*, Macmillan 1926

B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, Macmillan 1921

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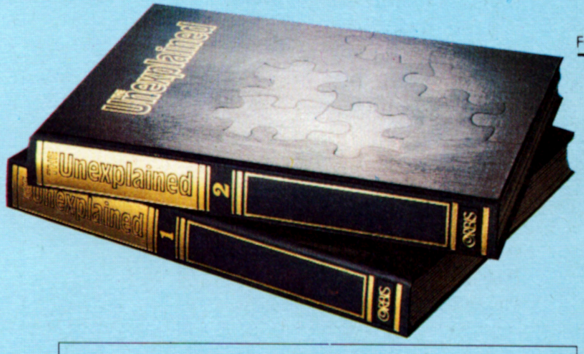

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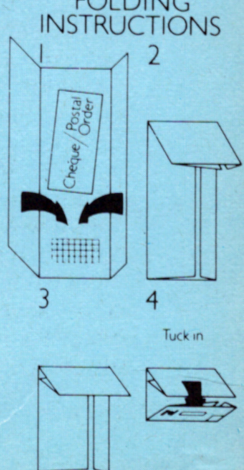

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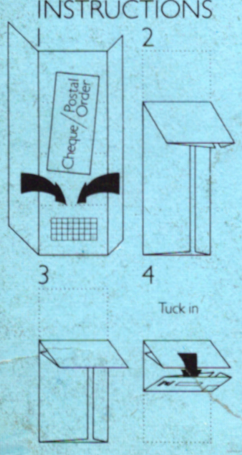

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